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THE CINCINNATI BUREAU OF MUNICIPAL RESEARCH

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Director.

Other than to carry out the general purpose of municipal research, and to apply its methods wherever necessary and possible, the Cincinnati bureau began its work in July, 1909, with no pre-conceived program. Its general purpose, in common with other bureaus, was stated briefly in the following words: "The purpose of the bureau is to conduct an entirely non-partisan study of the methods and work of the several departments of the city government, with a view to recommending such modifications and improvements as it believes to be of advantage; to do whatever it can to promote efficiency and economy of municipal administration; and to furnish citizens with the facts of public business."

As it was obviously impossible for the new bureau, with the limited funds at its disposal, to cover the whole field systematically from the beginning, work was begun with two departments through which to demonstrate the value of municipal research methods. The departments selected were those of Parks and of Health: the former for the purpose of demonstrating improved accounting methods; the latter for the purpose of demonstrating improved organization and service records.

Park Department.—The Park Department study included an investigation of the accounting system, the treatment of pay rolls, the purchase, inspection, storage, and care of supplies, and the collection of miscellaneous income. The fact was disclosed that the department was operating under a disconnected, uncontrolled system of single entry accounts, giving no basis for expense statements and, in several cases, confusing funds one with another in such a way that they could be separated only with difficulty. The department had practically no system of inspection of supplies, and consequently no means of knowing that it was receiving the full value for which it was paying. It had no idea of the quantity of supplies and materials at the storehouse and in the various parks, and had no accounting check on the waste or loss of supplies. It was purchasing in

such small lots that the office work was greatly increased, and the economy resulting from buying supplies and materials in large quantities was almost entirely lost sight of.

A full report, outlining a comprehensive plan of reorganization, was submitted to the Board of Park Commissioners, which thereupon passed the following resolution: "Resolved that the general accounting system as recommended in the communication from the Bureau of Municipal Research . . . be adopted and that the park manager be directed to proceed with its installation. . . ."

The system as installed provides the department with a business system of double entry books such as would be used by a first-class business corporation, and is similar to those already installed and in successful operation in the departments of New York City.

Upon the completion of the installation, the Board of Park Commissioners passed the following further resolution: "The system as installed is accepted and approved, and a vote of thanks extended the Bureau of Municipal Research for their assistance in the work."

Health Department.—The first work undertaken by the bureau in the Health Department was that of revising the methods of record-keeping. The necessity for such a revision will be seen from a few examples. Although it is obvious that no anti-tuberculosis campaign can be intelligently directed unless based on a careful registration system, the department was found to have no registration worthy of the name. No effective methods were employed for following up cases once reported, and, as no effort was made to check up the reporting of cases, there were fewer cases than deaths from tuberculosis reported every year. Similarly, notices served by sanitary officers ordering property owners to comply with sanitary regulations, lay in some instances for months and even a year or more without being enforced. To remedy such defects, the bureau designed a system of records. The tuberculosis registration system was modeled after that in use in the New York City Department of Health, though much simplified. By means of it, the department is now enabled to discover instantly whether a given case has been reported; when; by whom; whether the person is reported to be at home or in the hospital or sanatorium; if at home, whether or not under the care of a private physician; what the home conditions are, etc. If a physician reporting a death from tuberculosis has failed

to report the case when living, he is called upon to explain his failure. In the sanitary records, "tickler" devices were installed which automatically call to the attention of the central office any failure to inspect or reinspect at the proper time. Similar modifications were made in the records relating to general infectious diseases. The general purpose of these recommendations was to place the board and the health officer in possession of the information necessary to intelligent and effective control over their staff.

An investigation of the accounting system in the department led to a report urging the necessity for a reorganization along the lines already followed in the Park Department. The recommendations of the bureau were approved by resolution of the Board of Health, and the new methods installed.

Street Paving.—Before the Cincinnati bureau had been in operation more than a few months, and while the park and health studies were under way, it found a number of questions relating to street paving too urgent to be avoided. Property owners complained of new pavements being laid before they had finished paying the ten-year assessments on the old, which had gone to pieces. There was a general conviction that the pavements were not laid according to specifications, and that the prices were excessive. Nobody, however, seemed able to point out the exact difficulty, and the bureau was urged to investigate the whole subject.

The first inquiry bore upon certain wood block contracts which were being let to high bidders; in four contracts the 26 lowest bids out of a total of 41 were rejected, and the contracts awarded at a total figure of \$44,000 in excess of the lowest bids. The investigation of this practice led the bureau through many technicalities relating to the preservative qualities of various types of the so-called creosote oil used in treating wood paving blocks, the effect of free carbon in various percentages, the methods of testing, the proper distillation requirements, etc. As a result of its investigation, the bureau was brought to the conclusion that the high prices were entirely without warrant, being made possible by ambiguous and faulty specifications. It further appeared that, whether intentional or not, the effect of the specifications was to create a monopoly in wood block, all the contracts for over a year having gone to contractors using the product of the Republic Creosoting Company, of Indianapolis. These facts were presented to the city officials with a recommendation that

no further wood block contracts be let until the specifications had been revised. No attention was paid to this recommendation, and a quarter of a million dollar contract was let soon after at an excess cost of some \$30,000.

The bureau persistently maintained its opposition to the specifications, and its controversy with city officials continued for a considerable period, during which time the following reports were issued: Paving Report No. 1—Wood Block Contracts. Reply of Director Sundmaker to Paving Report No. 1 and Rejoinder of Bureau. Paving Report No. 2—Wood Block Paving: The Reading Road Contract. Paving Report No. 3—Wood Block Paving: Is High-priced Oil a Business Proposition? Paving Report No. 4—Wood Block Paving: Is High-priced Oil a Commercial Proposition? What Manufacturers, Dealers, and Experts say about the Cincinnati Specifications. Paving Report No. 5—What is being done on Reading Road: Reply to Chief Engineer's Communication to Director of Public Service *in re* Bureau's Paving Report No. 5.

Not only did the bureau find the wood block specifications thus defective, but a similar condition was discovered in the requirements for brick pavements. Under all the contracts let for some two years previously, the brick used had been the "20th Century," manufactured by the Fultonham Paving Brick Company. The monopoly seemed to have been primarily due to a clause in the specifications requiring the brick to be between two and a half and three inches wide. Nearly all manufacturers produce a paving brick or block between three and four inches wide, and declare it impracticable to alter their regular size in order to meet a slight demand for a width of less than three inches. It did not appear that the "20th Century" brick possessed especial advantages either in point of quality or in location of plant.

Finally, in March, 1911, after more than a year of controversy, new specifications were adopted by the city, covering all classes of pavements. The new specifications, while not beyond criticism, eliminated the above objectionable features. Other companies were able to compete successfully, and prices were reduced. The second revision, about to be put into effect by a new municipal administration, will reflect to a greater degree the bureau's recommendations. With the new requirements in operation, it is believed that the paving specification issue will have been brought to a close.

Not alone to the specifications was the bureau's attention directed; it also investigated the enforcement of the specifications in actual work. Aided by the contributions of property owners, the bureau placed inspectors on various important streets. A number of violations such as shortage of cement in the concrete mixture, substitution of slag cement for Portland, the use of poor materials, improper laying, etc., were discovered and corrected. In connection with the wood block controversy, the bureau made an effort to inspect the manufacture of wood blocks at the plant; but admission was denied to the bureau by the Republic Creosoting Company.

A sound paving policy requires not only proper specifications, well enforced; it also demands proper selection of pavements, and their replacement at the proper time, reasonably good and continuous repairs being assumed. The bureau has issued a report on the selection of pavements with special reference to economy, and an article by the bureau's engineer in the *Municipal Journal and Engineer* of January 18, 1912, suggests a formula which will be of interest to engineers for determining the proper time of replacement.

The bureau has therefore brought about a thorough revision of all paving specifications, thereby breaking up the monopolies previously existing in wood block and brick paving contracts. Prices, particularly for wood block and granite, have fallen appreciably; and had city officials heeded the bureau's recommendations when first presented, the city would have been the gainer by at least \$30,000. An actual saving of \$30,000 resulted from the enjoining of two contracts, upon evidence developed by the bureau.

Street Lighting.—In connection with the new ten-year street lighting contract, the bureau, in co-operation with several other civic organizations, was directly responsible for the revision of the specifications so as to include, especially, provisions for checking up the service rendered by the contractor, and provisions enabling the city to take advantage of any improvements in lighting methods, as well as provisions reserving to the city power to continue the use of gas if desired. It is believed that the public discussion of the terms of the contract was largely instrumental in reducing the prices, which, based on the approximate existing number of lamps, represent a decreased payment by the city of over \$60,000 a year.

Budget.—One of the conspicuous services of nearly all bureaus of municipal research is that of forcing upon public attention the

importance of the municipal budget. In the spring of 1910, the Cincinnati bureau presented to the mayor three recommendations:

1. That the mayor issue a form of departmental estimate providing for more information.
2. That the estimates of the various departments be made public as soon as received by the mayor.
3. That the mayor arrange one or more public hearings before he finally determined upon his budget.

These recommendations were not adopted in 1910, but when renewed in 1911 were approved by the same mayor. All departments were required to submit their estimates on uniform blanks devised by the bureau, which also provides for comparative data on past budgets and corresponding expenditures. When the estimates were received at his office, the mayor allowed them to be examined by anyone interested; and, before sending his budget to council, held a public hearing for the purpose of having department heads explain their needs and of receiving any suggestions.

This procedure was of value mainly in a preparatory way. Although the blanks were not in all cases completely filled out, the information furnished was much more extensive than formerly, and, in so far as utilized, could not have failed to assist the mayor's office in analyzing the estimates. The public hearing, characterized by the *Times-Star* as "the most representative body of citizenship seen in Cincinnati in many years," indicated a very considerable interest in the subject; and as citizens become better informed on municipal affairs, the opportunity to participate in the framing of the budget is bound to be increasingly taken advantage of. Co-operating with recently elected city officials who took office on January 1, 1912, the bureau conducted an investigation which enabled them to save approximately \$90,000 in the first semi-annual appropriation for 1912.

Classification of Municipal Expenditures.—Closely connected with budgetary procedure is the classification of municipal expenditures. If the city's accounts and financial reports are to show the cost of operating each branch of the various departments and kinds of work carried on, expenditures must be classified so as to set forth each department and kind of work separately, with the expenditures belonging to it. To secure the advantages of comparison, also, the classification of purposes of expenditure should as far as possible be

uniform for all departments, and the names of account headings should be concise and should represent classes of expenditures with well-defined limits.

The present classification of municipal accounts in Cincinnati is similar to that prescribed for all cities of Ohio by the Bureau of Inspection and Supervision of Public Offices, Department of Auditor of State, more generally known as the State Board of Uniform Accounting. Substantially the present classification has been in operation for some ten years; it often renders impossible even an approximate idea of the cost of city work, limits proper control over expenditures, and interferes with intelligent reporting. The Bureau has formulated and submitted recommendations for remedying these difficulties.

Deposit of City Funds.—On November 10, 1910, the Bureau of Municipal Research undertook an investigation of the deposit of city treasury funds to determine primarily how far the city (1) was being protected from loss, and (2) was obtaining the best rates of interest consistent with the necessary protection. A new ordinance, in the drafting of which the Bureau of Municipal Research co-operated with city officials, was passed in February, 1911. The first and more important object of the law has, in the opinion of the bureau, been on the whole well attained. While previously it was left entirely to the discretion of the city treasurer how much and what kind of security should be required, and in what banks and to what amounts the city's funds should be deposited, these points are now definitely provided for by the ordinance.

Higher rates of interest would, in the belief of the bureau, be secured (a) by amending the ordinance so as to provide for separation of active and inactive accounts, and (b) by reducing, if possible, the large cash balance in the city treasury. A term of one year instead of two is also advocated. To secure the first of these changes action by the legislature might be required; action of this kind was taken by the last legislature in reference to the county depository law.

Purchasing.—Under a new purchasing agent, a complete reorganization, largely along lines recommended by the bureau, has been begun of the methods of purchase and inspection of city supplies. All city departments now purchase through the central agency; current price records and files of dealers' catalogues are installed; supplies

are being standardized and bought or contracted for in large quantities, with consequent reduction in prices and greater facility of inspection; central inspection of supplies has already revealed many cases of failure to "deliver the goods." If the rate of saving already exhibited is maintained throughout the department's operations, the result of the current year's work may reasonably be estimated as a saving of upwards of \$100,000.

Other Work.—A considerable number of other studies are in progress at the time of this writing. Among these are:

Constructive plans for reorganizing the city's accounting methods, giving the auditor effective control, and centralizing most of the accounting work in his office.

Plans looking toward the amendment of state laws relating to municipal budgets and appropriations.

Efficiency study of the truancy department of the board of education.

Constructive plans outlining the establishment of new methods for caring for the city's dependent and delinquent children, in place of the present city institution known as the House of Refuge.

Co-operation in the reorganization of the Department of Buildings, especially providing for systematic inspection of buildings under construction or alteration, effective follow-up of all violation orders, and real enforcement of the tenement house regulations.

Study of methods of fixing the proportion of cost to be borne by property owners through special assessments, especially in connection with street improvements.

Conclusion.—It hardly needs to be pointed out that the rate of progress in work such as that in which the Bureau of Municipal Research is engaged depends in large measure upon the attitude of public officials. Where ready co-operation and a desire for improved methods are found, results are quickly secured. Where, on the other hand, a sustained opposition is encountered or a disinclination to change is maintained, the results are not as satisfactory and are obtained much more slowly, with greatly increased effort and expense. It is gratifying to the Cincinnati bureau to be able to say that its endeavors to assist the present city officials are welcomed, and with the co-operation now prevailing, a higher standard of municipal efficiency should be established in Cincinnati than has ever existed before.